

Opportunities for Women in Security

What Glass Ceiling?

Into the second decade of the 21st century, gender imbalance and discrimination issues are still hotly debated in society. However, the ever-changing mentalities and practices in business — and in security — are creating new and interesting professional development options for women.

BY CAMILLE SHIEH



In February 2011, former UK trade minister Evan Mervyn Davies released an independent review on the lack of female members in the country's corporate boardrooms. This year, more than 30 percent of the positions have gone out to females, as opposed to under 15 percent from the previous year, showing a favorable increase. Davies recommended that companies listed in the FTSE 100 index should aim for 25 percent of female members on their boards by 2015. A similar gender imbalance phenomenon was analyzed by US political scientist Micah Zenko in a July article, where he commented on the lack of female representatives in the US foreign-policy community.

Gender imbalance in the workforce is definitely not a new topic. What is new, however, is that in the two examples above, this acute imbalance was voiced by men. The "fight" for equal opportunities seems to have shifted focus to an issue that everyone, regardless of gender, needs to consider.

It has not always been rainbows and butterflies for women in the security industry, either. "I'm inspired by the women in the industry who started when there were almost no women at all," said Tracey Hups, Manager of Worldwide Marketing Communications at Pixim. "They worked hard to earn knowledge and experience, but had to fight even harder to be respected for it. They had to persevere through tough times and harsh atmospheres."

In Vivotek's sales team, currently one out of every four representatives are female. "We do not select candidates based on their gender, but based on their qualifications," explained Sharon Lee, Director of Brand Sales. "Women are not less knowledgeable about electronics or lack industry expertise. As long as one is sufficiently professional, respect will be gained and is not subject to gender."

In security, the gap is closing. It is agreed that the number of females occupying top management positions has experienced growth, although slower than anticipated. "I do see more women taking on these roles; however, the percentage of women in executive positions is still in single digits," Hups said. "In contrast, far more

than 50 percent of administrative positions are filled by women."

One reason for this change is because more educated women have gravitated to the field in general, observed Lisa Pryse, President of Health Care Division, Old Dominion Security. "Another reason is due to broad-minded CEOs and boards of directors."

There are definitely more women in IP surveillance than a few years ago, added Monika Mirczewska-Stanosz, Purchasing Manager of Suma. "Perhaps not many are in top management positions, but I do see more female managers overseeing regional sales or IP surveillance departments."

"I haven't witnessed a massive trend toward more female leaders in the security field, although I do see a lot of successful female sales leaders. In some divisions, like marketing and public relations, women have been known to have more flexibility and growth options," said Courtney Mamuschia, Director of Marketing for Video Intelligence Solutions, Verint Systems. "In an industry dominated by men, who wouldn't want a smart female sales representative to introduce some of the latest product and technology innovations?"

EARLY DAYS

Women often enter the industry with a related educational background, from a related industry or based on individual skill sets.

"I graduated with a graduate degree in electrical engineering, and chose to work for a megapixel-camera manufacturer in order to put my education to use," said Becky Zhou, Sales Director for APAC, Arecont Vision. "The breakdown of males versus females in the industry largely depends on personal interest. Fresh graduates who enter the industry are mostly from majors like engineering, computer science and other related fields, and these majors have a higher male-student percentage to begin with." According to the US Department of Education, statistical figures of female bachelor degree graduates from engineering and engineering technologies majors across the U.S. show a



▲ Tracey Hups, Manager of Worldwide Marketing Communications, Pixim



▲ Sharon Lee, Director of Brand Sales, Vivotek

decrease of 5.2 percent from 2004 to 2009, and the actual student count of 13,961 is far less than the male student count at 70,675. In computer and information sciences for the same time period, the female graduate count stands at 6,779, which trails behind the male count at 31,215. In both studies, a fivefold difference exists between male and female graduate counts in these educational fields.

Those with prior work experience in IT, physical security and other technology-related industries joined the security industry by chance. "I was a police lieutenant when I was offered in the late '80s an opportunity to build a small police and security department for a large trauma center," Pryse recalled. "Once I took this position and began to build the department, I realized just how much I did not know about hospital security and how much the regulations and environment change from year to year. It is that challenge of maintaining and improving security and safety in a forever changing health care environment that has kept me motivated in this industry."

Often, early work experience became the reason why women rejoin later. "I worked for PSA Security Network to put myself through college, but left as soon as I graduated with a degree in communications," Hups said. "A couple of years later, PSA had a marketing job open up, and they asked me to apply for it. I got the job and have been in the security industry ever since."

Women with a strong sales and marketing skill set discover that the security industry is dynamic and full of opportunities. "I entered the security industry in 2010 after spending the previous 15 years in the electronics and test and measurement industries," said Wendi Burke, Director of Global Marketing Communications, IQinVision. "As a marketer for advanced technology, I was presented with several attractive incentives and opportunities to make a significant impact on the company's position in the security market, which I could not pass up."

Changing technologies have also created opportunities for women outside the industry to join. "I previously worked in public administration but have always been keen on technology. I learned of my company from social acquaintances, and that IP surveillance is emerging as a new industry," Mirczewska-Stanosz recounted. "It seemed exciting to become part of a company that deals with new solutions and to explore new markets."

One of the reasons that keeps women in this industry is the challenges and rewarding experiences they face on a daily basis. "Technology is evolving rapidly, and



▲ **Lisa Pryse**, President of Health Care Division, Old Dominion Security



▲ **Monika Mirczewska-Stanosz**, Purchasing Manager, Suma



▲ **Courtney Mamuscia**, Director of Marketing for Video Intelligence Solutions, Verint Systems



▲ **Becky Zhou**, Sales Director for APAC, Arecont Vision

there are a lot of opportunities to make a big difference to customers," said Kelly Romano, President of Global Security Products, UTC Fire & Security. After 27 years with UTC, Romano feels that there is still much to learn, but prior experience can be applied directly. "More than 20 years of developing customer relationships and partnering with them have given me much insight into how to make a meaningful difference. The industry structure is similar — it's all about relationships, channel strategy and technology."

MILESTONES

Experiences of women vary across the industry, and gender discrimination is not universally experienced. "The security industry is certainly still a male-driven domain, but I've never had the feeling that I was disadvantaged because of my gender," said Heidi Wand, VP of Finance, Security Systems and Products, Siemens Building Technologies.

"Initially, it might appear that a woman needs to



▲ **Wendi Burke**, Director of Global Marketing Communications, IQinVision



▲ **Kelly Romano**, President of Global Security Products, UTC Fire & Security

accomplish more to be taken seriously in a technology-based industry,” said Jennifer Pittman, Regional Sales Manager, Samsung Techwin America. “However, as she studies, learns and grows, there is no reason she can’t excel. It is a level playing field for both sexes.” The best countermove for discrimination is refining one’s industry expertise and exhibiting even more confidence.

TIPPING POINT

“Initially, I encountered challenges from the female nurses as well as the male facility engineers, as they were not confident that I could provide the organization with a secure environment simply because I am a woman,” Pryse recounted. “I discovered that I had to immerse myself into all facets of physical security, fire system operations and hospital and government regulations associated with providing a secure environment. In addition to learning to manage a blend of police and security officers responding to the same types of calls, I had to implement electronic access control, become a locksmith, an emergency manager, a hazardous materials manager and much more.”

“We have a female field application engineer in the company, and she has provided tremendous help to customers,” said Maggie Chao, Assistant VP of Sales and Marketing, EtherWan Systems. “In the beginning, customers might not have expected too much seeing that she is a woman. But once they found out that she is technically knowledgeable, it automatically boosted their



satisfaction level. I personally do not feel that gender differences have affected my career, although it seems that the stereotype has always been there.”

Sometimes, men believe that women belong in certain roles, which makes it difficult to advance; many women who have risen in the industry ranks have also adopted the same misperceptions, Hups observed. “One of the founders of an industry women’s support organization approached me and asked if I wanted to join the group. Flattered, I said I would look at the membership. Later, I was horrified when I realized that her invitation was only extended because she wanted me to perform administrative work. I don’t mean to denigrate administrators; however, it was clear that this woman, in a senior industry position, envisioned other women in the industry as holding predominantly administrative roles. The lack of any cohesive, beneficial program or association for women in the security industry has served to delay the acceptance of women in management positions in this industry.”

The world is definitely transforming from older mentality of “woman belongs in the kitchen” to a gender-neutral playing field, Mamuschia said. “There have been plenty of successful women running multibillion-dollar global organizations; however, I am sure they have come across their fair share of biased opinions on where a woman’s place should be and had to work harder to prove themselves. I was recently at an event where an elderly gentleman commented that my skills could be put to use babysitting his grandchildren. This clearly demonstrates that some men think women should be barefoot and pregnant, while others continue to promote growth within an organization.”

CULTURAL AND REGIONAL BARRIERS

At times, women experience difficulties while conducting business due to local cultural traditions or regional public safety. In conservative societies with well-defined social and gender roles, female foreigners must take creative approaches to conclude business or maintain friendly partnerships.

“I had a unique experience in India, where the project involved giving a presentation to a local temple,” Zhou said. “According to this religious sect, men are disallowed from speaking to any woman. It was impossible for me to support this customer, and in the end a male colleague carried out the presentation instead.”

Gender differentiation is felt more strongly in the Middle East, Lee recalled. “In this region, women typically remain in the domestic sphere. I remember visiting a channel partner there with whom I enjoy good relations, but had to use the men’s restroom as it was the only one in the office.”

“Safety is another crucial issue to consider in many cases,” Lee added. “Places with political unrest and social predicaments would have us think twice about sending an unaccompanied female sales representative to conduct normal business with local partners or customers. In this case, when we look for suitable candidates to oversee sales activities in these regions, the consideration we give to the safety issue would have a great effect on the result.”

EMPOWERMENT

To keep up with the ever-changing industry, various training programs and seminars are available. “I would recommend leadership training on an ongoing basis, and participation and credentialing with ASIS International — it provides training for all facets of security,” Pryse suggested. Taking part in associations like the Women’s Security Council also allows women to connect with other female peers in the industry for mentorship or social networking assistance. Female veterans provide great inspiration for new entrants to draw from when building a career in this industry.



▲ Heidi Wand, VP of Finance, Security Systems and Products, Siemens Building Technologies



▲ Jennifer Pittman, Regional Sales Manager, Samsung Techwin America



▲ Maggie Chao, Assistant VP of Sales and Marketing, EtherWan Systems

Aside from further education, interacting with other industry experts face-to-face is another way to fast-track. "Trade shows are a great place to learn about the latest," Romano said. "But nothing beats talking directly to customers and hearing about what they want and need, seeking input on their experiences — both good and bad."

Manufacturer representatives are a great source of product knowledge, Pittman added. "They are experts of equipment, from whom one could learn about the various features and functions of different types of devices. Having this knowledge increases one's credibility and provides a sense of confidence in the solution-based industry."

Hands-on experience with system installation and integration is beneficial, if not essential, regardless of gender. "Throughout the years, I have come to understand both installation issues and ways of improvement for system integrators, which were learned from actual installation practices," Lee said. "Our sales team carries out simple installations at trade shows, and from these practices they understand what issues integrators might run into. These queries get reported back to the R&D team."

Women should have hands-on experience with system installation and integration if they are going to provide any type of oversight in the security arena, Pryse added. "Physical security is paramount in the holistic approach to a safe environment; the practitioner must understand how the various systems interface with one other."

In spite of a higher male population, security is no longer a male industry today. "It used to be that for a woman to play in a 'man's field,' she would have to become 'one of the guys,' often compromising her integrity and morals if she wanted to get ahead," Burke said. "For the most part, that is no longer the case. Women have been advancing their careers by proving beyond doubt, they are knowledgeable, technologically savvy and able to quickly and creatively adapt to new trends and dynamic shifts."

CHANGING TIMES

More women are taking over top-management positions in the security industry, as seen in various recent appointments. With growing changes come new and exciting opportunities for women looking to establish a career in security. Do not limit yourself; do not give excuses based on your gender, Lee said. "Security is full of great opportu-



▲ Women are taking over top-management positions gradually. In spite of higher male representation, security is no longer a male-only industry today.

nities, and it does seem more recession-proof than other industries. Be aware that you need a tough shell and must be willing to learn all facets of security to be more readily accepted in an industry that is still male-dominated — even though this is changing," Hups said.

The effort one devotes to his or her career development will bear fruit in the form of job promotions or greater responsibilities, Lee said. Oftentimes, advancements made on the career ladder depend on personal qualities and traits, not gender. "Promotions go to ones who do the best jobs and help the company grow," Zhou said. "Women should break free from the notion that they need to work extra hard in a male-dominated world just because of their gender. They should continue to empower and enrich themselves with industry knowledge and think of ways to improve personal skill sets. Otherwise, they are quitting before even starting."

Learn the industry, know the products you are selling/using, understand the technologies and build good relations with channel partners in order to be successful, Zhou said. "This applies to both sexes."

"The advice that I would give to anyone, male or female, is to become an expert in your chosen field and maintain that expertise with a constant and unyielding thirst and passion for continuing education, knowledge and experience," Burke said. "Don't be afraid to take risks and always remember that wisdom is gained through both success and failure. Only those who have experienced both will be the greatest leaders of tomorrow."

